



# County of Los Angeles CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
500 West Temple Street, Room 713, Los Angeles, California 90012  
(213) 974-1101  
<http://ceo.lacounty.gov>

WILLIAM T FUJIOKA  
Chief Executive Officer

September 18, 2009

To: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman  
Supervisor Gloria Molina  
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas  
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich  
From: William T Fujioka  
Chief Executive Officer

Board of Supervisors  
GLORIA MOLINA  
First District

MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS  
Second District

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY  
Third District

DON KNABE  
Fourth District

MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH  
Fifth District

## STATION FIRE (AGENDA ITEM 66-B, SEPTEMBER 1, 2009 BOARD MEETING)

On September 1, 2009, your Board directed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to work in conjunction with the Fire Department (Fire), Sheriff Department (Sheriff), Department of Animal Care and Control (ACC), Community Development Commission/Housing Authority (Housing Authority), Department of Public Works (DPW), Department of Regional Planning (DRP), and the Assessor (Assessor) to perform the following:

- Perform a thorough review of the effectiveness and failures of the County's mass emergency notification system.
- Ensure that the information posted on the County's website about the fires is real-time, accurate, and user friendly and that protocols and procedures are developed to institutionalize the real-time posting of such information/updates on natural disasters and other significant incidents in the future.
- Authorize Section 8 housing vouchers to qualified individuals and families, to apply a local preference to those individuals and families, to apply to HUD for any additional funds, including emergency vouchers, and to dispatch a response team to evacuation centers to assist individuals whose homes were lost in the fire.
- Assess the effect of the fires on the watersheds of Los Angeles County, including impacts upon the infrastructure of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (including dams, debris basins, channels, and storm drains),

*"To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service"*

**Please Conserve Paper – This Document and Copies are Two-Sided  
Intra-County Correspondence Sent Electronically Only**

and take immediate action to provide flood protection, prevent hillside erosion, to reduce potential impacts upon County residents.

- Work with Federal and State agencies, including the Natural Resource Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Forest Service, and the State Department of Water Resources, and the County Fire Department to effectively implement and fund temporary flood protection measures to protect residents living near burnt hillsides and canyons from potential effects of devastating mudflows due to loss of vegetation on slopes.
- Expedite the issuance of permits and establish one-stop permitting centers in those areas impacted by the recent fires.
- Develop concessions for property owners whose homes were damaged or destroyed in the fires, including extending deadlines for upcoming property tax payments, adjusting property taxes to reflect the recent loss of structures, or deferring payments to future tax years.

In response to your Board's direction, the CEO has collaborated with the above mentioned departments to address the components of the motion. The information provided in this report serves as an initial response. Once the Station Fire is fully under control, the CEO will reconvene all departments to develop a thorough after-action assessment report which will include both the successes of the County's actions and the improvements required to better serve the public's safety and well-being when the next disaster occurs.

**Review of the effectiveness and failures of the County's mass emergency notification system.**

The County's mass emergency notification system is operated and managed by the Sheriff. Therefore, Sheriff's personnel assigned to the Communications and Fleet Management Bureau and Emergency Operations Bureau were asked to perform a thorough review of the effectiveness and failures of the County's mass emergency notification system.

To date, the Alert LA system has been utilized 48 times, including 21 activations related to the Station Fire alone. In each case, the system fulfilled its function properly. The system appropriately made mass notification telephone calls to residences within each area identified by Fire as being in need of evacuation.

However, during the Station Fire, the Sheriff did experience a human input error regarding the exact parameters of the area to receive an evacuation order (Activation #32). As a result of the over notification, areas not in need of evacuation nonetheless received the call to evacuate. Specifically, it is estimated that approximately 3,500 homes were inadvertently notified to evacuate. While any error is regrettable, particularly when it relates to a citizen's home or family, over notification is preferable to under notification in critical circumstances. The over notification was caught by the operator who made it and corrected immediately but not before incorrect notices were delivered.

The Sheriff will be providing additional training for the operators of the Alert LA system which will improve operator performance. The Sheriff's Emergency Operations and Communications and Fleet Management Bureaus have already met on this issue and will implement remediation and training for all staff that may be tasked with the use of the Alert LA system.

**Ensure that the information posted on the County's website about the fires is real-time, accurate, and user friendly and that protocols and procedures are developed to institutionalize the real-time posting of such information/updates on natural disasters and other significant incidents in the future.**

During the initial phase of the Station Fire, there was a lack of communication between the County Public Information Office (PIO) and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). The absence of bilateral communications was due to the fact that neither office implemented the established protocols and procedures for exchanging information to update the County website. In this incident, due to staff turnovers, the institutional knowledge failed to transfer through the organizations. Once the faulty communication issue was recognized and resolved, protocols and procedures were followed and updated information regarding the Station Fire was posted on the County website.

Every effort has been made to provide the most up-to-date information to the residents of Los Angeles County. However, unlike news agencies or other alternative media, PIO and OEM have the obligation to provide the most accurate information possible. In order to provide reliable information for the County's residents, OEM is required to verify all information with each County department as well as State and Federal agencies for its accuracy. Only departments with specific jurisdiction have the authority to authenticate the information. For example, only the Coroner can determine the number of deaths resulting from an incident. This process may hinder the immediate posting of information that other media sources may have already reported without the verification from government entities.

Recognizing the need for real-time information, the PIO and OEM will convene a series of meetings in the near future to retool the current protocol and procedures and develop new ways to improve the delivery of news. The two offices will include the agreed modifications in the Station Fire after-action report.

**Authorize Section 8 housing vouchers to qualified individuals and families, to apply a local preference to those individuals and families, to apply to HUD for any additional funds, including emergency vouchers, and to dispatch a response team to evacuation centers to assist individuals whose homes were lost in the fire.**

Since the initial stages of the Station Fire, the Housing Authority has been working closely with OEM and other County departments involved in the fire to monitor and anticipate the potential impact on displaced families that are currently Section 8 clients or may qualify for the program.

Prior to your Board's motion on September 1, 2009, the Housing Authority's Assisted Housing Division assembled four (4) teams and made the necessary preparations to have equipment and staff ready upon the order to deploy to assist displaced families. The Housing Authority also reviewed its Section 8 tenant roster to anticipate and determine the number of clients in the affected areas. A total of 137 voucher holders were identified and the call center was notified to expect a higher volume of calls resulting from the fire.

Once the evacuation centers were functional, the four (4) teams from the Assisted Housing Division were dispatched with the goal of identifying any existing Section 8 clients and provide information and assistance to any displaced families that may qualify for the Section 8 program. During the process, the Assisted Housing Division assisted with the distribution of HUD applications and will continue to provide support to families throughout the application process.

Information regarding possible Section 8 assistance to fire victims has also been posted on the Housing Authority website as well as the County website. Once the Local Assistance Centers (LACs) are established, the Housing Authority will be available to send staff to provide Section 8 information and assistance to eligible families.

**Assess the effect of the fires on the watersheds of Los Angeles County, including impacts upon the infrastructure of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (including dams, debris basins, channels, and storm drains), and take immediate action to provide flood protection, prevent hillside erosion, to reduce potential impacts upon County residents.**

The areas burned by the fires include portions of the Los Angeles River, San Gabriel River, Santa Clara River, and Santa Monica Bay watersheds. The Los Angeles County Flood Control District (District) is participating in a regional scientific study to evaluate the affect of wildfires on the quality of receiving waters.

Intense fires can increase runoff due to a water repellant layer just below the soil surface created by the burned vegetation. Depending on the amount and intensity of rainfall within the watershed, burned areas will experience a substantial increase in erosion, resulting in a greater than usual volume of sediment flow in the streams. Ash and other charred material will also be washed away by storm runoff.

District infrastructure incurred very little damage from the Morris and Station Fires. The damage that was incurred has neither impacted the structural integrity nor the operational functionality of any District facility.

Damage to District facilities and infrastructure was limited to communication lines at the San Gabriel and Pacoima Dams, electrical and communication systems at Morris and Big Tujunga Dams, and loss of on-site staff housing and five (5) rain gauges within the burn area of the Big Tujunga Dam. The District is working to re-establish power and communication to these dam facilities.

The District's primary area of concern is the debris potential from the burned watersheds and the subsequent impacts upon District facilities and private property. In preparation for potential mud and debris flows, the District has identified nine (9) debris basins in immediate need of clean out. There are a total of 21 debris basins with tributary burned watersheds. These facilities will be closely monitored by District personnel during storm season so that clean outs will be performed as deemed necessary. Additionally, seven (7) debris basins have been identified that require measures to increase their storage capacities. Installing these measures will lessen the potential impacts to adjacent communities.

As part of the District's post-fire responsibilities, engineering teams have been deployed to locations on the fringe of the burned areas. These engineering teams are providing advice to residents on temporary mudflow protection measures. The District has established a toll free number, (800) 214-4020, to answer questions from the public on issues of mud and debris flow mitigation.

**Work with Federal and State agencies, including the Natural Resource Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Forest Service, and the State Department of Water Resources, and the County Fire Department to effectively implement and fund temporary flood protection measures to protect residents living near burnt hillsides and canyons**

**from potential effects of devastating mudflows due to loss of vegetation on slopes.**

DPW is currently coordinating efforts with the United States Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, California Fire, and affected cities. The department is working with the United States Forest Service to schedule a Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Agency meeting to include all impacted stakeholders. That meeting is tentatively scheduled for the week of September 21st. The date and location have yet to be determined.

**Expedite rebuilding permits and establish one-stop permitting centers in those areas impacted by the recent fires.**

Prior to building permit issuance by DPW, the rebuilding project applicant must obtain approvals from various County departments such as DRP (land use and zoning), Public Health (water wells and septic systems), and Fire (fire engineering and fuel modification).

With the understanding that each rebuilding project will have its own unique challenges, the CEO, Fire, DPW, DRP, and Public Health will do the following to expedite the process of the homeowners:

- CEO and the departments will meet to coordinate rebuilding requirements with the goal of identifying proper department contacts that will be responsible for working together to ensure a collaborative interdepartmental permitting process.
- DPW will take the lead in being the point of contact in coordinating meetings with each of the affected property owners to provide guidance on the specific issues and challenges related to rebuilding their home.
- CEO will confirm that all County departments have activated processes to expedite all fire rebuild plan submittals and re-submittals.

**Develop concessions for property owners whose homes were damaged or destroyed in the fires, including extending deadlines for upcoming property tax payments, adjusting property taxes to reflect the recent loss of structures, or deferring payments to future tax years.**

The Assessor's office has continued to work with Fire, local building & safety departments, and United States Forest Service to obtain information in order to immediately lower the assessed values on those properties where the structures are

totally destroyed, assuming there has been at least \$10,000 in damage (as per State law). In such circumstances, an application is not necessary.

Where the damage is not readily visible (partially damaged, boarded up), the Assessor will have to await an interior view or obtain information from the property owner, which typically is sent in with the application. Regardless, the reduction will be effective as of the date of damage. In addition, the Assessor will staff all one-stop disaster recovery centers and attend all town hall community meetings to distribute forms and answer questions.

### **Station Fire After-Action Report**

In anticipation of the full containment of the Station Fire this week, the CEO is scheduling a meeting of all the departments involved in preparing this status report for purposes of analyzing the County's response to the Morris and Station Fires and developing improvements in areas where glitches occurred. A comprehensive after-action report will be submitted to your Board upon the completion of this analytical assessment. The report will include an overview of the Morris and Station Fires, the successes, the failures, and the improvements that are required to better prepare for future disasters. The report will also include feedback from the affected local cities and unincorporated town councils.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Deputy Chief Executive Officer Brence Culp, Public Safety, at (213) 893-2374 or Deputy Chief Executive Officer Lari Sheehan, Community and Municipal Services, at (213) 893-2477.

WTF:SRH:BKC:LS  
DC:dc/llm

c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
County Counsel  
Sheriff Department  
Department of Animal Care and Control  
Assessor  
Community Development Commission/Housing Authority  
Fire Department  
Department of Public Works  
Department of Regional Planning